



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Food and  
Nutrition  
Service

3101 Park  
Center Drive  
Alexandria, VA  
22302-1500

December 21, 2012

Dear State Directors:

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) invites State agencies that administer the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) to apply for Direct Certification Improvement Grants to fund the costs of improving your direct certification rates with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other needs-based assistance programs, as allowed under Federal statute and regulations.

Section 749(h) of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-80) provided \$22 million that the FNS must issue as grants to State agencies that administer the NSLP and have the lowest rates of children directly certified for free meals, for the purpose of improving those rates. Under the 2010 appropriation, in July 2010, FNS announced a request for applications (RFA) for State agencies to apply for Direct Certification planning and implementation grants. Applications in response to the 2010 RFA were accepted on a quarterly basis through July 2012, and FNS awarded 31 grants to 21 State agencies, totaling approximately \$14 million in grant funding. FNS now is announcing a new Direct Certification Improvement Grant opportunity to make available to States approximately **\$8 million** in remaining funds to be used for direct certification improvements.

### **Purpose of Grants**

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 (P.L. 111-296) amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) to add provisions intended to encourage States to improve program access through direct certification, including:

1. Requiring States to reach percentage benchmarks for direct certification rates for children in households receiving assistance under SNAP according to the following timelines: 80% for school year 2011-2012; 90% for school year 2012-2013; and 95% for school year 2013-2014 and each school year thereafter; and
2. Requiring States that fall below the benchmark for the previous school year to develop and implement continuous improvement plans (CIPs) to describe specific measures that the State will use to identify more children who are eligible for direct certification, including improvements or modifications to technology, information systems, or databases.

The purpose of the Direct Certification Improvement Grants described in the new RFA is to fund State agency activities in planning and implementing direct certification improvement projects that will help them **reach and maintain the direct certification rate benchmarks** mandated by the HHFKA. Ultimately, FNS intends for the grants to assist States in improving access, increasing accuracy, and reducing paperwork in the NSLP and SBP by simplifying the certification process for free school meals.

### **Types of Grants Offered**

FNS is offering two types of Direct Certification Improvement Grants:

1. **Tier 1: Limited-scope planning and implementation grants** may be awarded for up to **\$150,000** under a simplified application process to fund planning (particularly continuous improvement plans for those not meeting 80% benchmarks in school year 2011-2012) and short-term implementation projects of limited scope. Please note that **funding is limited to no more than \$75,000 for planning activities**. The grants will be awarded for periods of up to one year. States will have six opportunities to apply in 2013: *February 1, March 1, April 1, May 1, June 3, and July 1, 2013* (if funds remain available); and
2. **Tier 2: Full-scope implementation grants** may be awarded for up to **\$1,000,000** to fund direct certification implementation projects of significant scope, for periods of one to three years. State agencies will have two opportunities to apply: *April 1, 2013 and July 1, 2013* (if funds remain available).

### **Who Can Apply**

This RFA is extended to all State NSLP agencies; however, a State agency may apply for **only one grant under this RFA**—either one Tier 1 application or one Tier 2 application, but not both. Grant awards will not be competitive as long as sufficient funding is available to fund all fully responsive applications with potential to significantly improve direct certification performance. If sufficient funding is not available to award grants to all applicants, FNS reserves the right to give preference to applications from States with the lowest direct certification rates with SNAP, as reported in the 2012 Direct Certification Report to Congress published on the FNS public website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/CNP/cnp.htm>. Preference also may be given based on the amount of grant funding already awarded previously to applicant agencies for direct certification improvement purposes under the 2010 Direct Certification Grant RFA (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Grants/Grants2012.htm>).

### **Application Process (Electronic Submission)**

To apply for this funding opportunity, applicants may download the grant application forms (SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, and SF-LLL) from the Grants.gov website at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Also, these required application forms and the RFA, with appendices, may be downloaded from the FNS grants website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm>. Applications must be submitted electronically through the [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) website **by 11:59 pm eastern time** on the applicable application date deadline in order to be considered for that round of selections. The website will send a confirmation notice to the applicant to confirm that the application has been accepted by the system. Upon receipt of the notice, the applicant must then send an email to notify the FNS Grant Officer Carla Garcia ([Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov)) that they have received a confirmation notice from Grants.gov that the application was received. **If the applicant has not received confirmation of a successful submission or needs technical assistance; please contact the Grants.gov helpline at 1-800-518-4726 or email the help desk at [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov).** FNS will not accept mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered applications. All application packages must be

submitted on Grants.gov. FNS will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received on Grants.gov.

In order to submit your application via [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), you must have obtained a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and registered in both the new Systems for Award Management (SAM) and on Grants.gov. The applicant is strongly advised to allow ample time to initiate all the required system's registration, and its Grants.gov electronic application submission. All applicants must have current Central Contractor Registry (CCR) status at the time of application submission and throughout the duration of a Federal Award in accordance with 2 CFR Part 25. Please visit the following websites to obtain additional information on how to obtain a DUNS number ([www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com)), register in SAM (<https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>) and register in Grants.gov ([www.grants.gov/applicants/get\\_registered.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp)). You must have completed all the required registration steps before you may complete and submit your grant package on Grants.gov. Please make sure that you do this well in advance of your intent of submission. For specific information on the duration of the registration process for each system please visit the required system(s) website. In some instances registration in just one of the required systems can take three-five business days.

### **Materials and Information**

The attached "Request for Applications for Direct Certification Improvement Grants" provides detailed information about this grant opportunity and the application process. For convenience, the RFA and a Microsoft Word version of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 grant application templates (Appendices B and C) will be available in the Child Nutrition Division's (CND) PartnerWeb community at <https://www.partnerweb.usda.gov>. Within approximately three weeks of this RFA's publication, FNS will conduct a webinar with all State agencies and FNS regional offices to review the RFA and address questions regarding the application process. Notification of the webinar date, time and call-in information will be communicated via the FNS Regional offices and the CND PartnerWeb.

If you have questions regarding this grant opportunity, please contact Grant Officer Carla Garcia via email at [Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov). We look forward to receiving your applications for funding.

Sincerely,

**Original Signed**

Lael J. Lubing  
Director  
Grants and Fiscal Policy Division

**Original Signed**

Cynthia Long  
Director  
Child Nutrition Division

Attachments